

W A R,

Necessary, Just and Beneficial :

A N

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED

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COMMENCEMENT

AT

RHODE-ISLAND COLLEGE,

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BY TRISTAM BURGESS,

A CANDIDATE FOR THE SECOND DEGREE.

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PROVIDENCE:





# AN ORATION.

"BE READY FOR THINE ADVERSARY."

*A Mother to her Son.*

SHAKESPEARE.

**T**HIS day is consecrated to academical exercises. The beauties of science, and the charms of philosophy, are doubtless the most apposite themes for classical declamation. In this respect, however, the speakers of to-day have always had their choice. If propriety and decorum be consulted, they are not confined to any particular description of subjects. He, who now addresses you, would not advance a principle, or anticipate a possible juncture of circumstances, which might diminish the hilarity, or violate the solemnities of the present occasion. If his theme, or his sentiments, should be unpleasant to a single individual in hearing, that individual may be assured, that, neither the one was chosen, nor shall the others be exhibited, with any reference to any occasion, or any description of citizens.

THIS festive anniversary, this civick and classical parade, the concourse, the splendour, and even the very countenances of this numerous assembly, are so many testimonials, of the felicity of our country. But there are truths which tell us all these delights of peace may be violated. When we see yonder ensign, unfolding its red bosom to the winds of heaven, we feel the possibility of war. "Steel may glitter in the muses shade."

3 The first monitions of philosophy teach us to enjoy with moderation, and hope rationally; to familiarize the idea of probable calamities, and, if possible, deduce beneficial consequences from them. Influenced by this consideration, I have chosen War for the present theme. Let us, for a few moments, contemplate the necessity, the justice, the effects of war; and observe what reference they may, now have, to our own country.

REASONING from analogy, we shall be persuaded that war is inevitable. The two first brothers made war; one slew the other. Since then, individuals and nations, have conducted in the same manner; so that the history of the world is but the narration of war—a story of battle—stratagem—blockade—capitulation—conquest—and pillage. War has become an art. Its disciples are taught its precepts, and initiated into its mysteries; they become soldiers by profession, and follow the trade of arms to purchase the means of daily subsistence. If, from the birth of time, till now, war has, very frequently happened, will it not, in all probability, very frequently, happen again? We believe rivers will continue to roll towards the ocean, because they have ever rolled that way; and that the dews, and the showers of heaven, will always descend. For the same reason, war is just as inevitable.—If war be inevitable, it is also necessary.

THE necessity of it may be illustrated and further evinced, by a momentary view of our own nature and situation. Men have many relations, and these relations originate many rights. The eye of reason is not, at all times, sufficiently clear to perceive the line of separation between the rights of one man, and those of another.—Mental vision is often obscured, either by passion, or prejudice, or malevolence. From one or other of these causes, aggressions are constantly made. In a society, when one individual violates the rights of another, the arm of law compels remuneration. Among nations, it cannot be so. They have no common arbiter in whose decisions they will acquiesce; or whose power can force from the aggressor a reparation of injury. The wronged nation must tamely indure it, or else demand redress by war. So long, therefore, as nations, either by error, or by malevolence, will infract the laws of reciprocal righteousness, so long will war be inevitable, be necessary.

A WAR of *aggression* has not that kind of necessity which can render it just. It is indeed a polluted stream from the fountain of injustice. But if a war of *defence* be necessary, from that necessity, its justice is demonstrated. If one part of mankind will make aggressions on the other, why may not those aggressions be repelled by arms? If we may not make war, we may not resist injury. If that



resistance, which terminates in war, may not be made, no restraint will be left on the licentiousness of the profligate. Resistance is the only mound, opposed to that ocean of oppression, which, if this were broken down, must rush in and deluge the moral world. If resistance be not made, where will aggression terminate? "Injustice must sweep the wide earth, and trample down mankind."

If resistance be unjust, why do we sympathize with the injured; or why do we feel the same resentment at our own wrongs? God Almighty, the Omniscient, the All Good, knew that the felicity of his creatures depended on free-will, and that with free-will, they must be liable to transgression. To oppose this liability, he gave us resentment, that spirit of divinity which swells our hearts with indignation, sparkles in our eye, and nerves our arm against the wretch who dares abuse the freedom bestowed upon us by our common Creator.

A CERTAIN equilibrium is the preservation of all being. In the material world this equilibrium is maintained by repulsion. By repulsion each particle of matter drives back, and excludes from its own place, all its fellow atoms. If repulsion were destroyed, one atom would be constantly rushing into the habitation of another, and I know not what ceaseless mutations might fluctuate the universe. Resentment is the repulsion of the moral world. Take away resentment, take away resistance its offspring, and not only society would be destroyed, but even the human race itself would very nigh become extinguished. Battle, it is true, would be excluded from the earth; but the good must fall a prey to the wicked; and the world be transformed into one wide realm of unresisted rapine, pillage and massacre.

If a war of defence be unjust, why have we a principle of self preservation? Why do we love our country, our friends, our own being, if we are forbidden to raise our arm in their defence? Did God warm our hearts with these endearing attachments merely to encrease our wretchedness, and sharpen our agony at the destruction of their objects? He did, unless he has commanded us to spill our blood in their defence. What, must I see my country laid waste, my parents butchered, and the sword

reeking with the blood of my mother, plunged at my own naked bosom, nor lift a hand against the ruffian aggressor? I must, or a war of defence is a war of justice.

If I may not resist, he, who would take my life, may, justly, take it. I may take it myself. For surely I, or any other, may justly destroy what, neither I, nor any other, without injustice can preserve. This doctrine of non-resistance goes to the utter destruction of all virtue. If we may not defend our friends, our country, our brother-men, then friendship, and patriotism, and philanthropy, and benevolence are vices. Nay more, vice is transformed to virtue, parricide becomes piety, the stain of guilt is washed from the forehead of murder, and suicide itself canonized.

THERE was war in heaven, Michael and his angels fought against the spirits of perdition. Jesus, the meek and immaculate friend of humanity, Jesus said, he who takes the weapons of *aggression*, shall perish by them; but let him who has no sword of *defence* sell his coat and buy one.

THE intention of a just war is preservation. This ever is the effect of it, if the arm of violence be not too powerful for the arm of justice. Tho millions have fallen in battle; tho thousands of hills have smoked with blood; and the flame of many a conflagrant city reddened on the dark bosom of midnight; yet often are nations preserved by war alone. War has once been the salvation of our country. It wrested us, not from the parental embrace of a mother state, but from the iron arms of tyranny; gave us independence, and in a manner prepared for us the first nutriment by which we have grown to our present athletic, national maturity. War demolished the Roman Empire, that stupendous fabrick of despotism, built from the plunder, and trophied with the conquests, of a world. The Feudal System, a complication of servitude and domination, more base and ferocious, than any known to elder time, has been, by the influence of repeated wars, meliorated down to the mildness of modern British jurisprudence.

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WAR gives men the ineffable delight of defending all that is dear to them. There are those, whom to redeem from danger, we would die with extacy. I, this moment, behold men who have marched barefoot, many a winter midnight, and amidst the storm of many a battle, wished no greater joy than to throw their naked bosoms between their country and her foes. What then must they have felt on that day, when glad millions raised loud shouts of triumph to the God of armies, who extended his Almighty hand over the fields of Columbia, and frowned the tempest of battle from our hemisphere? When they saw their country safe? When they beheld parental age, extending the hands of benediction, while infancy smiled, as conscious of their kindness, and the eye of beauty beamed on them suffused with tears of gratitude?

If, therefore, war be inevitable, if, urged by injustice; nations will violate our rights; if a war of defence be justified by our own feelings the eternal principles of self preservation, the example of heaven, and the awful mandates of him who has all power in all worlds; if war save nations, demolish despotism, throw open the portals of immortal renown, and bestow the ineffable delight of defending all that can endear the possession of life; if it do all these things, let us banish all reluctance, and all temerity at the approach of battle; magnanimously give ourselves up to the voice of our nature, and our God, regarding the tempest in which we may be engaged, as we do those elemental contentions, which, for a while, seem to blot out the light and frown the universe into convulsions; but, when their fury is exhausted, pass off, leaving a sun brightened with additional lustre, and young creation laughing with renovated loveliness.

If at any time, in any region of the earth, any nation might apply these principles to themselves, this is the time, this is the country, we, my fellow-citizens, are that nation. The war between the United States and France is not merely necessary and just and beneficial.

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a war not only for our property, our independence and sovereignty; but for our manners, our morality, our religion; for all we enjoy, for all we hope. French rapacity, ambition, and demoralization aim to encircle in their all-devouring, all-contaminating embrace, whatever of wealth, or liberty, or virtue, may be found under the whole heaven. The war, therefore, is a war of humanity, moderation, and decency, against cruelty, profligacy, and impunity; a war of all the virtues against all the vices; in a word, a war of the principle of all good against the principle of all evil. To the French not even vice itself is pleasant unless it be audacious and cruel; unless it has in it something of perjured treachery; some violation of compact, or destruction of ancient institutions, or subversion of liberty and religion. Grown fastidious by a reiteration of common pillage, nothing can now satiate their unhallowed rapacity but spoils plundered from the cabinets of the learned, and the altars of the Almighty.

AMERICANS; you will think on Flanders and Italy. You will not suffer Gallick pollution to step over the threshold of your temples. You have patents and wives, and daughters, and the hallowed tombs of those who stood between your infant bosoms and the point of British steel. Round these you will form battalions, dark, terrible and resistless, as the cloud of the North fraught with the spiky artillery of heaven. Let the sons of Gaul beware. Let them step a hostile foot over the last wave of the Atlantic—not one shall escape. Their bones shall be left bleaching on our mountains; the scattered fragments of their ships shall mingle with the sea-weed that drifts upon our shores. What though they grasp at unlimited domination; what though they have nurtured to a gigantick stature a foul and fiend-like tyranny; who lifts his bloody forehead towards the stars of heaven; who tramples Europe under his feet, lays hold of Africa and Asia with one hand, and is reaching the other towards America; yet shall the monster soon be prostrated and the hallelujahs of triumph re-echo from Good-Hope to Nova Zembla, from Mississippi to the Ganges.



